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CONNECTING SELF ENHANCEMENT AND SELF VERIFICATION MESSAGES IN
FRIENDSHIPS

by

ANN SARAH BLOCH

B.A. University of Central Florida, 2004

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Nicholson School of Communication
in the College of Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Fall Term
2009

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the connection between self-enhancement and self-verification and confirmation and emotional support. The hypotheses predicted that there is a positive relationship between confirmation and self-enhancement and self-verification; people feel good about themselves when confirmed by friends, people feel that friends know them well when they are confirmed. The hypotheses also predicted that there would be a positive relationship between emotional support and self-enhancement and self-verification; people feel good when friends provide emotional support, and people feel that friends know them well when provided emotional support. A research question was also posed: Does family functioning have an effect on perceptions of self-enhancement and self-verification messages? To find the answers, a questionnaire was completed by 279 individuals. The results indicate two types of enhancement messages; a more specific and positive form of enhancement and more global (and negative) self perception of rejection. The findings are interesting and unique to self-enhancement in communication research which provides many avenues for continued research. Results also suggest that different elements of confirming communication influences perceptions of enhancement in different ways, emotional support predicts verification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people in my life who have supported me. First, I want to express my appreciation to my parents, for giving me so many amazing opportunities, the confidence to embark on my life's journeys, and teaching me how to give and receive unconditional love. I would also like to thank each of my grandmothers for always believing in me and sharing their infinite wisdom and patience. I would like to thank my brother for being my rock throughout my life. My friends have been supportive and patient with me through this process and I appreciate them for every moment of sanity they gave me. I cannot put into words how much I appreciate my thesis committee members, Dr. Sally O. Hastings, and Dr. James Katt for their insight, inspiration, and guidance. I want to extend a special thanks to my thesis chair, Dr. Weger, for truly being a mentor. Without each person on my support team this would not be a reality for me. Thank you, to each member of my village.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The ability of humans to communicate the ideas of the self is a unique quality and a main component in close personal relationships. Two main identity management processes have been identified by previous research. The first process, “self-verification,” involves the desire for confirmation of one’s preexisting self view. The second process, “self enhancement,” consists of one’s desire for positive appraisals from others.

Which process do people prefer? This sometimes depends on the context of the interaction and the situation. For example, Katz and Beach (2000) found that consistent views are important for relationship satisfaction in marriage. Conversely, increased partner support (Katz, Beach, & Anderson, 1996) is sought through enhancing feedback regarding positive self-views (Swan, Pelham, & Krull, 1989). In fact, Sedikides (1993) found more support for the self-enhancement view over the self-verification view with regards to self-assessment of central positive and negative traits (i.e., your good and bad traits). To explain, people would rather their positive traits be enhanced over their negative traits. The most recent research suggests that although sometimes the desire for one process outweighs the desire for the other, people generally prefer to be BOTH self-verified and self-enhanced (Katz & Beach, 2000).

A review of the current research on self-verification and self-enhancement leads one to conclude there is puzzle piece missing. Previous research on enhancement and verification is found mainly in the psychology and sociology literature (Weger, 2005). This thesis examines the missing piece: Specifically, what communication behaviors lead people to feel enhanced or verified in friendships, and what strategies do people use to verify or enhance friends? This

thesis argues that the study of self enhancement and verification should be addressed by communication scholars (not only Sociologists and Psychologists) in an effort to expand on this area of research.

1.1 Self-Verification and Self-Enhancement Research

1.1.1 Introduction

Previous research shows that the most important variable in relationships is communication. The processes of self-verification (SV) and self-enhancement (SE) are common in all types of relationships, including friendships. In the context of this research, self-verifying feedback is a communication behavior that aims at verifying a friend's self perceptions (truthful, congruent thoughts of selves) and self-enhancing feedback is a communication behavior that aims at enhancing a friend's self perceptions (complimentary and positive). People sometimes choose which type of behavior to use (verifying or enhancing) depending on the situation and the friend the feedback is directed towards.

Researchers have presented many arguments regarding preferences of verifying and/or enhancing messages. Katz and Beach (2000) found that their participants felt most attracted to their partner when mixed (SE and SV) feedback was provided. This study is congruent with previous findings in this area of research. Also, if one was forced to choose, SV is preferred over SE, although the combination is the most preferred. It has been noted (Katz & Beach, 2000) that the context of feedback influences what type of message is preferred. This shows that a combination of SE and SV feedback is seen as believable and confirms what the person already believes about themselves. The researchers established that a uniform type of feedback is not

preferred; rather, a positive response is elicited from feedback when it is both positive and believable and a negative response is generated from feedback that is not positive or believable.

According to Katz and Beach (2000), if someone is trying to use SV and provide feedback that is steadfast and true, the message must also be believable and congruent with the recipient's self-view or the recipient will respond negatively. Their research shows that the type or combination of feedback to use depends on the situation and the context of the conversation. Context can be the topic of conversation, relationship history, the environment, etc. As recipients of feedback, people want to know that others' views of them match their own. In other words, the recipient's beliefs of self are congruent with the provider's feedback of their view of them.

1.1.2 Self-Verification (SV)

Early research (Swann, 1983; 1987) posited that we find relationships satisfying with other people who verify our preexisting self view (how we see ourselves), "I want to be seen as I see myself." We are satisfied when messages are truthful and believable. Self verification in this study is the communication process in which feedback is consistent with another person's self view. When a relationship partner feels like the other person is providing verifying feedback, they may feel valued, satisfied, and have decreased rejection concerns (Swann, 1983; 1987). In general, people do not want to be rejected (i.e., people do not want their self view or self concept to be rejected). Rather, people want to be accepted and understood for who they believe themselves to be. Swann, Chang-Schneider, and McClarty (2007) expanded on previous individual self view research by incorporating the global view. The findings suggest that a cyclical relationship exists between self views, behavior, and the social environment (i.e., self

esteem and self concepts are enhanced by self views). Leary (2007) found that certain aspects of the self (i.e., “self-related motives,” which are ways in which we maintain; image, beliefs, self-awareness, etc., and “self conscious emotions,” are responses such as; guilt, shame, etc.) help social relations, including relationships.

In many situations, positively valenced feedback about the self produces the experience of self-verification. For example, Katz and Beach (2000) explain that positive feedback often confirms what people believe to be positive about them. In fact, the findings show that consistent views are important for relationships satisfaction; a positive response is gained when the feedback provided is positive and believable and a negative response is gained when the feedback provided is not positive or believable.

According to Katz and Beach (2000) SV theory proposes that we prefer when our relationship partner’s view of us is similar to our own, even when they see us negatively, because we perceive their feedback as truthful. Katz and Beach also proposed that the type of feedback provided (SV or SE) influences relationship satisfaction. Swan, Pelham, and Krull (1989) found that people seek SV feedback especially regarding their negative self-views. People want to hear the believable, if painful, truth instead of potentially untrustworthy flattery. This research found that people tend to have certain ideas about who they are, and want their partners’ feedback to be consistent with their self view (positive or negative) in order to confirm who they and their partner believe them to be. Katz and Beach (1996) found that self verification theory corresponds with the concept that self esteem varies and partners need to provide varied self esteem support based on their partner’s output in order to maintain relationship satisfaction. Consistently, studies

show that partners want to hear the truth from each other and receive feedback that is consistent with their own self view (which is affected by varying self esteem).

Swann, Hixon, and De La Ronde (1992) found that people seek self verifications to confirm that they know themselves and their partners know them too. The researchers posit that when self-views are confirmed (positive or negative) there is an increase in perceived satisfaction and intimacy. The findings show that people benefit from congruent support from their partners that is consistent with their own self views (positive or negative).

Research by Swann, De La Ronde, and Hixon (1994) found married couples experienced increased intimacy when their spouse's view of them matched their self view. Conversely, the same study found dating couples experienced increased intimacy when their partner viewed them positively. The level or status of the relationship seems to have an impact on what is valued by the partners. Katz and Joiner (2002) found that relationship satisfaction and increased connections are achieved when partner assessments are similar to self evaluations (i.e., the self view). Individual personal growth increases (Katz & Joiner, 2002) when the partner provides verifying feedback. It is important for people to feel that their perspective of the world is realistic (true) and that the world is actually seen as more orderly and predictable for people through the verification process. Therefore, if their partner shares their definition of reality (their view is confirmed), a person might feel more secure in the relationship (Swann et al., 1983, 1989, 1992, 1994).

1.1.3 Self Enhancement (SE)

According to Katz and Beach (2000), SE theory proposes that we would like our relationship partners' view of us to be complimentary and as positive as possible, "I want others to view me in the best way possible." Burkley and Blanton (2005) expounded that positive self-views are promoted by biased perceptions. Loved ones typically provide flattery (enhancing feedback) because they have biased perceptions and see their loved ones in the most positive light. Swann, Pelham, and Krull (1989) confirmed that people seek SE feedback regarding their positive self-views. Katz, Beach, and Anderson (1996) found that self enhancement theory corresponds with the concept that increased partner support of self esteem is important to relationship satisfaction. Does increased self esteem increase relationship satisfaction? Research by Sedikides (1993) on married couples and attraction proposed that SE feedback and support can have a positive effect on attraction and perceived satisfaction. People basically want to be seen as positively as possible by others and want to maintain a healthy self esteem (Leary, 2007; Swann et al., 2007). Also, people are attracted to others and relationships that make us feel good about ourselves and provide us with approval or acceptance (Leary, 2007).

Physical attractiveness comprises one area in which people typically desire self-enhancement in romantic relationships. Romantic partners tend to want their partner to have the most positive perception of their attractiveness as possible (Katz & Beach, 2000; Swann et al., 2002). In order to generate positive perceptions of their attractiveness, Swann, Bosson, and Pelham (2002) suggest that people 'put their best foot forward,' or present themselves highly positively in order to elicit a positive response. For example, Joe and Sue are friends. They meet

up to hang out with some other friends. Sue normally wears jeans, a t-shirt, and flip flops but she showed up wearing a casual dress. Joe said she looked really nice and asked if he should change. Sue is presenting a certain 'self' to her friends to gain positive feedback regarding her appearance from her friends.

Research by Stapel and Van der Zee (2006) focused on how interacting in groups effects self enhancement, complementarity, and imitation. The findings show that people tend to incorporate positive information and contrast negative information. This research focused on "other-to-self effects," how other people view you, how you view yourself, and the effects that has on each view. This view of SE incorporates the other person's view into the self-view; the self-view can be affected by SE feedback.

Although receiving enhancing feedback creates generally positive perceptions of the relationship, Katz and Beach (2000) found that "excessive self-enhancement may even backfire in some cases" (p. 1537). The findings explicate that by providing only SE feedback, one can show questionable motives (i.e., using too much flattery may be an attempt to just get someone into bed). If someone is trying to use SE and compliment or flatter another, the message must be believable and congruent with the recipients self-view or the recipient will respond negatively. For example, if someone believes themselves to be physically unattractive and another person uses an enhancing message like, "you are beautiful," this is neither believable nor congruent with the recipients self-view. This type of enhancing feedback may show the recipient that the sender is not trustworthy (Katz & Beach, 2000).

How we present ourselves has an effect on our friendships. Joiner, Vohs, Katz, Kwon, and Kline (2003) researched SE and the effects on interpersonal perceptions of same sex friends. Do we present ourselves as overly favorable to our friends (i.e., positive self presentations)? Some behaviors which we choose to exhibit can have the goal of influencing others' perceptions (positively or negatively). Perceptions can be influenced by the level of likability. Heatherton and Vohs (2000) found that likable people have positive personality traits and unlikable people have "antagonistic" traits (i.e., arrogant, phony, stubborn, rude, and unsociable). Joiner et al. (2003) found that females are more adaptive than men at accepting favorable SE. Colvin, Block, and Funder (1995) found that women self-enhance for themselves and men self-enhance to look better for others. The researchers posited that for women, positive or favorable self-presentations can show self-confidence and can be seen as means to increase their partner's physical attraction to them. According to the findings, regarding men, positive or favorable self-presentations can show arrogance and can be seen as means to increase their partner's positive view of them.

The previous sections outline both SV and SE research to show that there is academic controversy in the literature about whether SV or SE is more important. As previously stated, suggested by recent research, BOTH verification and enhancement are preferred, not one or the other (Katz & Beach, 2000). It is clear that studying SV and SE in conjunction is important to show that the preference is not outweighed for either, in fact, the preference varies.

1.2 Communication Drivers of Self-Verification and Self-Enhancement in Personal Relationships

Although a great deal of research demonstrates the importance of self-verification and self-enhancement to the success of personal relationships, little research examines which communication behaviors associate with perceived enhancement and verification. This thesis proposes to identify at least three likely candidates for influencing person perceptions of self-enhancement and self-verification. In this study, Confirming and disconfirming communication and the reception of emotional support will be examined as possible drivers of enhancement and verification.

1.2.1 Confirming and Disconfirming Messages

Buber (1957) first described “confirmation” as a process by which humans want to be understood for whom they are and who they will be by each other through communicative interactions. By acknowledging and legitimizing another’s self view through feedback (SE or SV), one is confirming what the other believes to be true about them (recognition) (Cissna and Sieburg, 1981). Confirmation can be achieved by the use of either SE or SV feedback, as long as the recipient’s beliefs of self are congruent the provider’s feedback of their view of them. If the self view is disconfirmed, then the feedback provided doesn’t correlate with recipient’s self view (invalidation). Cissna and Sieburg (1981) describe disconfirming communication as a communication of rejection of another’s world or self-view. People feel invalidated when others view of them is different then their own.

To explain confirmation through a set of generalized examples; if a person has a negative self view regarding their mathematical skills, “I am bad at math,” and receives negative feedback, “Maybe math just isn’t your best subject”, then their self view is confirmed, “I am bad

at math and someone else sees that too.” Similarly, if a person has a positive self view of their physical appearance, “I am pretty,” and they receive positive feedback, “You look very pretty,” their self view is also confirmed.

To explain disconfirmation through another set of generalized examples; if a person has a negative self view regarding their math skills, “I am bad at math,” and receives feedback from someone else that doesn’t match their negative self view, “You’re not bad at math, that test was just really hard,” then their self view has been disconfirmed, “I know I am bad at math what are they talking about?” Similarly, if a person has a positive self view of their physical appearance, “I am pretty,” and receives negative feedback, “You look better when you wear make-up,” then their self view is also disconfirmed, “I think I’m pretty, but they just said I need make-up to be pretty.”

Although the previous examples of confirming and disconfirming messages are completely generalized, they prove the point that it seems odd that research states that people always want to be confirmed. Just because a person is not good at math doesn’t mean they want others to notice it or even point it out. That only perpetuates a negative self view which although that is SV, it is also negative and thus not SE. Sedikides (1993) proposed that people are more apt to confirm their own positive traits and disconfirm their own negative traits. Also, people do not want to be lied to or flattered unnecessarily. It is important to not only relay messages that are congruent to the recipient’s self-view (verifying) and are appealing (enhancing), but also that are purposefully formulated with the other person (and their traits) in mind. This rationale leads to the following prediction:

H1: Confirming communication will be positively associated with perceptions of self-enhancement in friendships.

H2: Confirming communication will be positively associated with perceptions of self-verification in friendships.

1.2.2 Emotional Support

Emotional support is fundamental to the self-view (i.e., who we are, where we are going, what we feel) and to close relationships. Emotional support or supportive communication provides people with the feeling that someone else cares about them, is concerned about their well-being, loves them, and is interested in their life (Burleson, 2003). Certain colloquial behaviors are accepted as broad emotional support. People feel supported when others provide “a shoulder” in a time of need or “an ear” when they just want to be heard. For example, “you are here for me and I accept your supportive actions and messages.”

The ability to provide support is an important communication skill that is important for interpersonal relationships and satisfaction therein. By providing emotional support for another person, one may be enhancing and/or verifying depending on the context of the situation. Also, it is important to note that people could want support to be either enhancing or verifying. Consider this scenario; Susie broke up with her boyfriend because he cheated on her. She goes to her best friend, Amy, for support. Amy hugs her and tells her he is a jerk, she can do better, and she is a beautiful and wonderful person. Amy gets upset. Why? This is not the type of emotional support Susie was looking for. She was seeking someone to listen and instead Amy gave her opinion which didn't match Susie's. If Amy had just listened to Susie first she would have been in sync

with what Susie needed, “an ear.” As this example shows social support can come in many forms, but choosing which form of emotional support to provide is the real communication skill. Also in this example, we can see how behaviors lead people to feel verified and/or enhanced. Since previous research has implied that emotional support should be associated with feeling understood and with feeling better about one’s self, the following prediction is made:

H3: The availability of emotional support in friendships will be positively associated with perceptions of self-enhancement.

H4: The availability of emotional support in friendships will be positively associated with perceptions of self-verification.

1.2.3 Family Functioning

In order to control for possible extraneous influences on perceptions of enhancement and verification in friendship, family functioning will be included in the analysis. Leung and Leung (1992) found that the relationship adolescents’ have with their parents influences their self concept. Applying this theory to friendships, if someone has a lower self-concept (associated with family functioning) then it is possible that they are apt to feel less enhanced and verified and/or verified by friends. Along this rationale, family functioning would be positively associated with both SE and SV. To explain, if family functioning decreases self-concept then perception of SE and SV decreases.

Following the same motivation, Sedikides and Luke (2008) found that family dysfunction results in self-criticism. As family dysfunction increases, self-criticism increases. For the

purposes of this study, the more self-critical a person is, it stands to reason that they are likely to feel less enhanced by a friend. Therefore, the following research questions were asked:

RQ1: Will family functioning be associated with self-enhancement?

RQ2: Will family functioning be associated with self-verification?

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participant Recruitment and Experiment Procedures

In order to facilitate assessment of the relationship between self verifying and self enhancing messages in friendships, a survey was created to further study these variables. A separate scale was used to measure each variable (see appendix A). The questionnaire was designed to examine the following variables; verification messages, enhancement messages, confirming messages, and emotional support.

The participants were recruited from three undergraduate communication classes at the University of Central Florida (UCF) during the fall term of 2009 (n=279). The questionnaires were accessible through the website SurveyMonkey™. The UCF instructors gave consent via the approved university email for the students to be invited to complete the survey on SurveyMonkey™ using a direct link to the survey website. Extra credit was approved based on each participating professors' desires. Any participant enrolled in the participating professors' courses who wanted to receive extra credit used an anonymous system on SurveyMonkey™ to report the completion of the questionnaire to the professor.

The participants were briefly introduced to the study and were instructed to complete the questionnaire at their own pace. There was no time limit and the students could complete the survey at their convenience. Each participant received an email from their participating instructor at UCF with a link to SurveyMonkey™. Each participant received the same questionnaire which contained the experimental stimulus message, measures of message preference, a measure of

friendship satisfaction, a measure of confirming behaviors, communication skills, family communication, and a set of demographic questions.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were directed to a new link which connected them to another survey in SurveyMonkey™. This new survey was unattached to the first in any recordable way. Participants were directed to insert their name and instructor name in order to receive extra credit. This design ensured anonymity of the participants, yet still enabled extra credit data collection to provide to the participating UCF instructors.

2.2 Measurement Instruments

Due to the nature of SurveyMonkey™, the questionnaire appears as one section. The design of the survey kept each different set of measure questions together. Each questionnaire totaled 80 items not including the demographic questions or extra credit link at the end of the questionnaire. The following sub-sections (2.2.1-2.2.3) will discuss the different types of measurement instruments and their reliability. The participants were asked to keep one particular friend in mind when answering every question. In order to assist participants with keeping one particular friend in mind they were asked to insert the friend's initials in a textbox. Before each measurement section of the questionnaire participants received the following instructions: "Please rate your agreement with the following statements while keeping your friend in mind that you identified at the beginning of the survey." The participants responded to the questions and statements keeping one certain friend in mind for evaluation consistency.

2.2.1 Dependent Variables

Two dependent variables were identified in this study; enhancement and verification. In order to assess these variables participants were asked to respond to two sets of 14 statements (totally 28 questions) using a five point Likert scale (5 = “strongly agree, 1 = “strongly disagree) to assess message preference; enhancing and verifying messages (e.g., My friend knows who I am deep down inside, my friend values me as a person, my friend doesn’t understand me, my friend sees me as a hard worker). The enhancement and verification scales were developed to measure the participants’ report of enhancement and verification in a particular friendship. Since this was a new measure of enhancement and verification, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to examine the dimensionality of the instrument. Based on eigen values greater than one and interpretability of the factors, three factors were identified to underlie the items. Table 1 depicts the items and factor loadings on each of the three factors. The three factors were titled Rejection (i.e., the opposite of enhancement) made up of 8 items and had a cronbach’s reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .93$. A second factor was titled Enhancement which was made up of 8 items with an $\alpha = .88$. The third factor, Verification, also shows a high reliability of $\alpha = .88$. Table 2 depicts the means, standard deviations, and alpha reliability coefficients for all variables in the analysis.

Table 1

Rejection, Enhancement, and Verification Items and Factor Loadings.

| Scale | Item | Loading |
|-----------|--|---------|
| Rejection | My friend makes me feel like I’m no good at all. | .92 |

| | | |
|--------------|---|-----|
| | My friend makes me feel like I don't matter to him/her. | .91 |
| | My friend is ashamed of me. | .86 |
| | My friend thinks I'm worthless. | .84 |
| | My friend thinks I am someone I am not. | .79 |
| | My friend doesn't know the real me. | .73 |
| | My friend doesn't know who I really am. | .66 |
| | My friend doesn't understand me. | .63 |
| Enhancement | | |
| | My friend sees me as a hard worker. | .80 |
| | My friend is proud of me. | .78 |
| | My friend thinks I am intelligent. | .71 |
| | My friend thinks that I am successful. | .68 |
| | My friend makes me feel important. | .65 |
| | My friend thinks that I am attractive. | .64 |
| | My friend thinks that I am a good person. | .64 |
| | My friend thinks that I am fun to be around. | .59 |
| Verification | | |
| | My friend knows how I am deep down inside. | .79 |
| | My friend knows how I am really feeling even if I don't say anything. | .72 |
| | My friend can guess what I am thinking. | .71 |
| | My friend sometimes knows me better than I know myself. | .68 |
| | My friend sees me as I see myself. | .60 |
| | My friend knows both my good and bad qualities. | .57 |
| | My friend knows the kind of person I am. | .54 |
| | My friend understands me. | .51 |
| | My friend values me as a person. | .50 |

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for All Variables in the Analysis

| Variable | <i>M</i> | SD |
|-----------------------|----------|-----|
| 1. Rejection | -4.51 | .67 |
| 2. Enhancement | 4.24 | .50 |
| 3. Verification | 4.23 | .54 |
| 4. Invalidation | -4.03 | .71 |
| 5. Recognition | 4.14 | .54 |
| 6. Ego Support | 4.27 | .65 |
| 7. Comforting | 4.24 | .65 |
| 8. Family Functioning | 3.74 | .52 |

2.2.2 Independent Variables

2.2.2.1 *Confirming Messages*

In order to measure confirming communication, the participants responded to 25 questions using a five point Likert scale (5 = “strongly agree”, 1 = “strongly disagree”) to assess confirming messages (e.g., My partner often acts interested in what I have to say, my partner teases me in a way that hurts my feelings, My partner makes eye-contact while we talk, my partner often interrupts me). Again, because this is a relatively new scale, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to identify the underlying dimensions of the instrument. Based on eigen values greater than one and interpretability, a two factor (using varimax rotation) solution was obtained (Table 3 includes all items and factor loadings). The first factor was labeled

“Invalidation” and appears to be consistent with Laing (1961) and other’s (e.g., Cissna & Sieberg, year) conceptualization of disconfirming communication as invalidating a person’s experience, message, or emotions. The reliability coefficient for this scale was good, $\alpha = .89$. The second factor was labeled “Recognition” as it conforms to Cissna and Sieberg’s conceptualization of confirming messages function as expressing recognition of the other person as a valid interaction partner. The reliability for this scale was also very good, $\alpha = .88$.

Table 3

Recognition and Invalidation Items and Factor Loadings.

| Scale | Item | Loading |
|--------------|--|---------|
| Recognition | My friend pays attention to me when I am talking | .76 |
| | My friend usually listens carefully to what I have to say. | .73 |
| | When we talk, my friend does his/her part to keep the conversation going. | .73 |
| | I feel as though I am usually able to say everything I want to say without being judged. | .64 |
| | My friend makes eye-contact while we talk. | .64 |
| | My friend usually accepts my point of view as being accurate. | .63 |
| | My friend often acts interested in what I have to say. | .55 |
| Invalidation | My friend teases me in a way that hurts my feelings. | .81 |
| | When I try to bring up a problem I am having, s/he denies the problem exists. | .77 |
| | When I bring up something that upsets me, my friend tells me that I shouldn’t complain about it. | .76 |
| | My friend often tells me that my feelings or thoughts are wrong. | .74 |
| | My friend ignores me when I try to talk to her about something important. | .72 |
| | When I begin a conversation, my friend often changes the subject to something s/he wants to discuss. | .70 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| My friend often seems uninvolved in our conversations. | .70 |
| My friend often takes over the conversation and does not allow me to do much of the talking. | .70 |
| My friend often makes irrelevant comments that have little to do with what I am talking about. | .69 |
| My friend often interrupts me. | .67 |
| My friend blames me when we have a disagreement about something. | .66 |
| My friend often says things like, “You shouldn’t feel that way” when I want to discuss a problem I have. | .66 |
| My friend often makes jokes at my expense. | .66 |
| When I talk about something that is bothering me, my friend tells me that it’s no big deal. | .63 |
| When my friend is angry or upset with me, s/he pouts and then denies that there is anything wrong. | .59 |
| My friend often criticizes me and then says that s/he was only joking or did not really mean it. | .57 |
| My friend tells me how I should feel about a problem or issue that I bring up. | .57 |

2.2.2.2 Emotional Support Behaviors

In order to measure emotional support, participants were asked to complete two subscales of the Communicative Functions Questionnaire (CFQ) (Burleson & Samter, 1990). The first subscale was a measure of ego support (e.g., My friend makes me believe in myself) and a measure of comforting (e.g., My friend can really cheer me up when I’m feeling down). Both scales use a five point Likert scale (5 = “strongly agree”, 1 = “strongly disagree”). The CFQ was originally created by Burleson and Samter (1990) to assess the importance of certain communication skills in friendships. Both the ego support, $\alpha = .92$, and the comfort $\alpha = .89$ met acceptable levels of reliability.

2.2.2.3 Family Functioning

Family functioning was measured using a shortened version of the Index of Family Relations (IFR) (WALMYR, 1996). The IFR was designed to measure intra-family stress and the severity of problems family members have relating to each other. Research suggests the construct validity of the IFR (e.g., Hamilton & Orme, 1990). The five items (see Appendix A) show good reliability, $\alpha = .76$

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS

3.1 Correlations

Table 4 presents the simple correlations among all variables. Because so many of the variables exhibit high correlations, it was decided that multiple regression analysis should be performed to examine how each independent variable is related to each dependent variable when all the other variables are controlled.

Table 4

Correlations Among All Variables in the Analysis

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Rejection | 1 | -.43 [*] | -.47 [*] | .75 [*] | -.45 [*] | -.40 [*] | -.42 [*] | -.22 [*] |
| 2. Enhancement | | 1.00 | .56 [*] | -.48 [*] | .59 [*] | .68 [*] | .59 [*] | .10 |
| 3. Verification | | | 1.00 | -.36 [*] | .57 [*] | .63 [*] | .59 [*] | .11 |
| 4. Invalidation | | | | 1.00 | -.52 [*] | -.45 [*] | -.46 [*] | -.15 [*] |
| 5. Recognition | | | | | 1.00 | .56 [*] | .50 [*] | .14 [*] |
| 6. Ego Support | | | | | | 1.00 | .72 [*] | .06 |
| 7. Comforing | | | | | | | 1.00 | .10 |
| 8. Family Functioning | | | | | | | | 1.00 |

* p < .05

3.2 Multiple Regression

In order to test the four hypotheses predicted in this thesis the data collected were analyzed using multiple regressions. Interesting results emerged from the analyses; two forms of enhancement were identified. This shows that people place a value on the message that is presented. The two types of enhancement are Enhancement and Rejection.

Hypothesis one (H1) predicts that confirming communication would be positively associated with perceptions of self-enhancement. In order to test this prediction, two multiple regression analyses were performed. The first model used specific enhancement as the dependent variable with Invalidation and Recognition (the two types of confirming messages), ego support, comforting, family functioning, self-verification, and rejection as the independent variables. Results indicate the overall model was significant $R^2 = .55$, $F(7, 256) = 44.88$, $p < .001$. The hypothesis test received mixed support: Invalidation was not a significant predictor, $\beta = -.11$, $p = .11$, but Recognition was a significant predictor, $\beta = .19$, $p = .001$.

As mentioned, two forms of self-enhancement emerged in the data. Because of this a second regression equation was computed using Rejection as the dependent variable and Invalidation, Recognition, ego support, comforting, family functioning, self-verification, and Rejection as the independent variables. Results indicate the overall model was significant $R^2 = .63$, $F(7, 256) = 61.90$, $p < .001$. The Invalidation confirmation results are also significant, $b = .70$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis two (H2) predicts that confirming communication would be positively associated with self-verification. In order to test this prediction a multiple regression analysis

was performed with self-verification as the dependent variable and both confirming communication factors as the independent variables. Ego support, comforting, family functioning, and both enhancement variables were also entered as control variables. The use of the control variables allows a test of the unique contribution of confirming communication to predicting self-verification. Results indicate the overall model was significant $R^2 = .54$, $F(7, 256) = 43.53$, $p < .001$. The results show that for the Recognition confirmation is significant, $b = .267$, $p < .001$. The invalidation confirmation results are also significant, $b = -.284$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis three (H3) predicted that emotional support in friendships will be positively associated with perceptions of self-enhancement. Two types of emotional support were used in the analysis, comforting and ego support. Results of the regression model discussed above reveals that ego support, $b = .38$, $p < .001$ was significantly associated with positive-enhancement but comforting was not, $b = .09$, $p = .15$. For Rejection as the dependent variable, results indicate that neither ego support $b = .06$, $p = .37$, nor comforting, $b = .00$, $p = .99$, were associated with perceptions of rejection.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) predicted that emotional support in friendships will be positively associated with perceptions of self-verification. The results of the multiple regression reveal that ego support, $b = .25$, $p < .001$ was significantly associated with $b = .20$, $p = .002$ were significantly associated with self-verification.

Research questions 1 and 2 asked whether family functioning influenced perceptions of self enhancement and self verification. To explore this research question, family functioning was entered into the multiple regression analyses described above. Family functioning did not

predict either Enhancement, $\beta = .01$, $p = .80$, or Verification, $\beta = -.01$, $p = .90$. Family functioning did, however, predict Rejection such that an increase in family functioning resulted in a decrease in perceived Rejection, $\beta = -.10$, $p = .01$.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

This study concluded that people want both verifying and enhancing messages from friends. This is congruent with and expands upon previous findings (Katz & Beach, 2000). This thesis argues verification and enhancement should be studied more by scholars to enhance this area of research. Through analyses of the data this thesis proves that it is necessary to continue to study verification and enhancement. To explain, previous enhancement studies show that there is one type of enhancement communication, when in fact from this research, two types of enhancement emerged, a positive form and a more rejecting form associated with feelings that the friend does not value the person.

The first type of enhancement is labeled “Rejection,” and includes more global self-conceptions such as, “My friend makes me feel like I am no good at all,” and “My friend is ashamed of me.” The second type of enhancement is positive and labeled simply “Enhancement,” and includes more specific self-conceptions such as, “My friend thinks that I am successful” and “My friend thinks that I am attractive.” This could be because people think about global and specific issues differently in terms of their self-image. People want to be viewed by friends in the most positive way possible (e.g., attractive, successful, fun to be around, etc.) (Katz & Beach, 2000) but that doesn’t mean that all enhancement messages are positive. It is possible, and evident from this data, that people can negatively enhance others. Can self-image affect how we perceive enhancement messages?

The first hypothesis predicted that confirming communication would be positively associated with perceived self-enhancement. The results show that there is a positive relationship between confirming communication and specific enhancement. If a friend's Recognition increases then the person feels better about themselves (enhanced). This is congruent with previous findings (Katz & Beach, 2000). The results show that there is a negative relationship between confirming communication and global (rejection related) self-conceptions. If a friend's Invalidation increases then the person does not feel good about themselves (less enhanced). These mixed results can be explained by the two different types of enhancement which emerged. Sedikides (1993) proposed that people are more apt to confirm their positive traits and disconfirm their negative traits.

The second hypothesis predicted that confirming communication would be positively associated with self-verification. Both types of confirmation were tested; Recognition and validation. The results show verification is positively associated with Recognition confirmation and negatively related to Invalidation. If a friend's Recognition increases then the person feels more understood (verified). Invalidation is positively related to Rejection, which means the more Invalidation, the more negatively the person feels their friend perceives them. It seems odd that Invalidation did not predict specific enhancement which is interesting since it contradicts theory; confirmation can be achieved by the use of either SE or SV feedback, as long as the recipient's beliefs of self are congruent the provider's feedback of their view of them (Cissna & Seiburg, 1981). It is unclear whether this is methodological, or is Invalidation a self-verification relevant behavior and Recognition is more of an enhancement trigger?

The third hypothesis predicted that emotional support in friendships would be positively associated with perceptions of self-enhancement. Specific enhancement was positively associated with emotional support. If a friend's emotional support increases then the person feels good about themselves (enhanced). People like to know that others know who they are and are concerned about their well-being, love them, and are interested in their life (Burleson, 2003). Comforting was not a significant predictor though. The results, however, did not show a significant relationship between Rejection and emotional support.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that emotional support in friendships will be positively associated with perceptions of self-verification. The results show that emotional support was significantly associated with self-verification. This is congruent with previous findings (Burleson, 2003). If emotional support increases then the person feels more understood (verified).

Two research questions arose during this study because it seemed that family functioning might influence people's perception of being enhanced or verified. Results indicate that family functioning does not influence the perception that the target friend enhances or verifies the participant's self-conception. However, believing that one's family is well functioning appears to reduce the participant's perception that his/her friend is rejecting. This seems to fit well with the idea that poor family functioning increases self-criticism and the resulting self-critical increases a person's perception that her/his friends likewise see the participant more negatively.

4.1 Limitations of the Current Study

This research does have some limitations. It is possible that when answering a questionnaire the participants may not have kept one particular friend in mind. The questionnaire may have limited the connection to real life situations. For example, some of the questionnaire items were like scenarios whereas most were statements that the participants had to rate the messages. When a questionnaire isn't in scenario format, the participants may misconstrue the meaning of the question.

Another limitation was the fact that the participants were young, college age (mean=21), and may have little experience with relationships including friendships. For example, people learn how to deal with conflict through experience over years. Being that the participants were young in years they may have limited experiences with adult situations. A maturity rating scale would have helped to understand where the participants were mentally. Although, most of the participants are still living home or recently left home, so the family functioning section is probably a good indicator of actual family communication.

Also, the use of technology for data collection may have hindered the connection a researcher has with participants and made the participants take this research less seriously. The average age of the participants, as previously mentioned, was 21 and this age group is extremely accustomed to using technology but there is a bit of disconnection when using technology versus traditional data collection methods. The fact that the participants could complete the survey at their leisure and convenience probably assisted with the disconnection, because they were in their own element when they completed the survey. This technological self-reporting method may have presented issues with factual answers. Participants may have lied or they could have

been extremely honest because they never had to see single researcher and therefore may felt extremely secure that their responses were anonymous.

A typical limitation, from which this study is not exempt, is the concept of perception. Each statement or question in the survey could have been perceived differently based upon the personal experiences and influence. There is nothing to resolve this limitation, researchers must be aware of it and try to create a simple design for the survey in order to limit different perceptions of the same question.

4.2 Future Directions

The data indicated in the results section show that new ideas are emerging from this research and future studies may focus on a few of the independent variables discussed in this thesis (e.g., family functioning, confirmation, emotional support). It is possible that this research may propel more research on family functioning, conflict, comfort, ego-support and self-enhancement and self-verification. It would be interesting to see more correlations between human behaviors and self-enhancement and self-verification. The findings from this thesis, although limited, are relevant and significant. These finding should be further explored to expand upon the research, perhaps for publications.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Self-Verification

Instructions: Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

U = Unsure

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. | My friend knows the kind of person I am. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 2. | My friend knows both my good and bad qualities. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 3. | My friend sees me as I see myself. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 4. | My friend accepts me for who I am. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 5. | My friend values me as a person. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 6. | My friend can guess what I'm thinking. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 7. | My friend knows who I am deep down inside. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 8. | My friend knows how I am really feeling, even if I don't say anything. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 9. | My friend understands me. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 10. | My friend sometimes knows me better than I know myself. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 11. | My friend doesn't know who I really am. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 12. | My friend thinks I am someone that I am not. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 13. | My friend doesn't know the "real me." | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 14. | My friend doesn't understand me. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

Self-Enhancement

Instructions: Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

U = Unsure

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. | My friend thinks that I am attractive. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 2. | My friend thinks that I am intelligent. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 3. | My friend makes me feel important. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 4. | My friend thinks that I am fun to be around. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 5. | My friend sees me as a hard worker. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 6. | My friend thinks that I am a good person. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 7. | My friend is proud of me. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 8. | My friend thinks that I am successful. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 9. | My friend thinks I'm worthless. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 10. | My friend makes me feel like I'm no good at all. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 11. | My friend makes me feel like I don't matter to him/her. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 12. | My friend is ashamed of me. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 13. | My friend makes me feel good about myself. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 14. | I feel better about myself after talking to my friend. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

Communicative Functions Questionnaire (CFQ)

Instructions: Please rate your agreement with the following statements while keeping your friend in mind that you identified at the beginning of the survey.

SA=Strong Agree

A=Agree

U=Unsure

D=Disagree

SD=Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. | Makes me believe that our relationship is strong enough to withstand any conflicts or disagreements we might have | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 2. | Makes me believe it's possible to resolve our conflicts in a way that won't hurt or embarrass each other. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 3. | Makes me feel like I can be really honest about the things in our relationship that produce conflict. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 4. | Makes me see that even the best of relationships have their conflicts or disagreements that need to be worked through. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 5. | Makes me realize that it's better to deal with conflicts we have than to keep things bottled up inside. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 6. | Can make conversation seem effortless. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 7. | Starting up a conversation with almost anyone in any kind of situation. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 8. | Makes conversation seem really easy and fun. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 9. | Can "shoot the breeze" for hours on end. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 10. | Makes me strive to be the very best person I can be. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 11. | Makes me believe in myself. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 12. | Makes me feel like I can achieve my personal goals. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 13. | Makes me feel like my ideas about things are interesting and worthwhile. | | | | | |

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| | | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 14. | Can really help me work through my emotions when I'm feeling upset or depressed about something. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 15. | Helps me understand why some things hurt or depress me so much | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 16. | Can really cheer me up when I'm feeling down or upset. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 17. | Almost always makes me feel better when I'm hurt or depressed about something. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 18. | The ability to convince people to do things they wouldn't normally do. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 19. | Coming up with really good reasons for getting people to do what he/she wants. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 20. | Can get people to do just about anything. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

Confirming Behaviors

Instructions: We are interested in how people perceive their friend's communication behavior. Keep your current friend's communication behavior in mind while completing the questionnaire. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements using the scale below:

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

N = Neutral/Not sure

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. | My friend often acts interested in what I have to say. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 2. | My friend often criticizes me and then says that s/he was only joking or did not really mean it. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 3. | My friend ignores me when I try to talk to him/her about something important. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 4. | My friend often takes over the conversation and does not allow me to do much of the talking. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 5. | My friend teases me in a way that hurts my feelings. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 6. | My friend often interrupts me. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 7. | My friend often makes irrelevant comments that have little to do with what I am talking about. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 8. | My friend often says things like, "You shouldn't feel that way" when I want to discuss a problem I have. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 9. | My friend often seems uninvolved in our conversations. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 10. | My friend tells me how I should feel about a problem or issue that I bring up. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 11. | My friend makes eye-contact while we talk. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 12. | When I begin a conversation, my friend often changes the subject to something s/he wants to discuss. | SD | D | N | A | SA |

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 13. | When we talk, my friend does his/her part to keep the conversation going. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 14. | My friend usually listens carefully to what I have to say. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 15. | My friend blames me when we have a disagreement about something. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 16. | When I talk about something that is bothering me, my friend tells me that it's no big deal. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 17. | When I try to bring up a problem, my friend often denies that the problem exists. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 18. | When I bring up something that upsets me my friend tells me that I shouldn't complain about it. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 19. | My friend often tells me that my feelings or thoughts are wrong. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 20. | My friend touches me when we talk. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 21. | My friend pays attention to me when I am talking. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 22. | I feel as though I am usually able to say everything I want to say without being judged. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 23. | When my friend is angry or upset with me, s/he pouts and then denies that there is anything wrong. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 24. | My friend often makes jokes at my expense. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 25. | My friend usually accepts my point of view as being accurate. | SD | D | N | A | SA |

Index of Family Relations

Instructions: Please rate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

N = Neutral/Not sure

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. | The members of my family really care about each other. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 2. | I think my family is terrific. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 3. | My family gets on my nerves. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 4. | My family is a real source of comfort for me. | SD | D | U | A | SA |
| 5. | I feel like a stranger in my family. | SD | D | U | A | SA |

Demographic Information

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1. | I am: Male Female |
| 2. | My friend is: Male Female |
| 3. | I am ____ years old. |
| 4. | My friend is ____ years old. |
| 5. | I am: |
| | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; padding: 0 10px;"> Caucasian Hispanic African American </div> |
| | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; padding: 0 10px;"> Caribbean Asian Other N/A </div> |
| 6. | My friend is: |
| | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; padding: 0 10px;"> Caucasian Hispanic African American </div> |
| | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; padding: 0 10px;"> Caribbean Asian Other N/A </div> |

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Ann Bloch

Date: October 13, 2009

Dear Researcher:

On 10/13/2009, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Type of Review: | Exempt Determination |
| Project Title: | Self-enhancement and self-verification |
| Investigator: | Ann Bloch |
| IRB Number: | SBE-09-06473 |
| Funding Agency: | |
| Grant Title: | |
| Research ID: | N/A |

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Joseph Bielitzki, DVM, UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 10/13/2009 09:30:55 AM EDT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Joanne Muratori'.

IRB Coordinator

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